



AVE MARIA
UNIVERSITY™

Spring 2026

Interdisciplinary Student Research Symposium

Saturday, April 11, 2026

Program

THE HONOR  SOCIETY OF
PHI KAPPA PHI

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Welcome

Thank you for being here and for taking the time to learn from our students, who have devoted countless hours towards researching their respective subjects. Their dedication to the pursuit of knowledge has truly made their professors proud.

This Symposium demonstrates the extraordinary variety of scholarship going on at this institution. It is an interdisciplinary event. You will hear from a variety of different majors, from Biochemistry to Marine Biology, from Philosophy to Literature. Overall, we have twenty different majors represented.

St. John Paul II repeatedly underscored the importance of research in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, a papal document critical to the mission of Ave Maria University. John Paul II explains that a Catholic University:

“is a place of research, where scholars *scrutinize reality* with the methods proper to each academic discipline, and so contribute to the treasury of human knowledge. Each individual discipline is studied in a systematic manner; moreover, the various disciplines are brought into dialogue for their mutual enhancement.”

He continues:

“In addition to assisting men and women in their continuing quest for the truth, this research provides an effective witness, especially necessary today, to the Church’s belief in the intrinsic value of knowledge and research.”

At this Symposium, our students’ research underscores Ave Maria University’s commitment to the continuing quest for truth. By producing excellent scholarship, our students demonstrate the intrinsic value of knowledge and research.

Excellence in scholarship contributes toward a thriving intellectual climate. In his *Idea of a University*, St. John Henry Newman writes,

“...it [a university] contemplates neither moral impression nor mechanical production; it professes to exercise the mind neither in art nor in duty; its function is intellectual culture.”

Our hope is that this Symposium will contribute towards the end of affirming and further solidifying the intellectual culture here on campus. We hope that you enjoy and appreciate what you get to learn from our students. Please know how grateful we are that you have elected to join us today.

May God bless you and Our Lady keep you,

Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.—Co-Chair of AMU Research Committee

Jessica Schnepp, Ph.D.—Co-Chair of AMU Research Committee

Agnes Berki, Ph.D.—President of Phi Kappa Phi (AMU Chapter)

John Spadaccini, M.S.—Phi Kappa Phi Public Relations Officer (AMU Chapter)

Acknowledgements

The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, AMU Chapter and the Research Committee would like to thank the following for their assistance with the success of the Second Annual Interdisciplinary Student Research Symposium:

Research Committee:

- Dan Davy, ex officio
- Dan Schreck, ex officio
- Ron Freeze, Ph.D., Co-Chair
- Jessica Schnepf, Ph.D., Co-Chair
- Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
- Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
- John Spadaccini, M.S.

Phi Kappa Phi President

- Agnes Berki, Ph.D.

Staff Organizer:

- Matthew King

Student Organizers:

- Noah Perez
- Juliana Marchese
- Emily Campau
- Gabriela Breen
- Vivianna Gray

Audio Visual Department

- John Paul Hare, Coordinator of Audio/Visual Setup and Staff

Metz Culinary Management

- Catherine Longo, General Manager
- Amy DeStefano, Retail & Catering Manager

Symposium Schedule

- 8:00 a.m. Registration/Information Table**
- 9:00 a.m. Opening Ceremony in O'Bryan Performance Hall**
Opening Prayer
Opening Remarks: Jessica Schnepf, Ph.D., Co-Chair of AMU Research Committee
Welcome Address: Roger Nutt, Ph.D., S.T.L., S.T.D., Provost
- 10:00 a.m. Poster Session**
- 11:00 a.m. Poster Session**
- 12:00 noon Lunch in Bob Thomas Student Union Ballroom**
- 1:00 p.m. Panel Session 1 in Prince 116, Prince 115, and Prince 114**
- 2:15 p.m. Panel Session 2 in Prince 116 and Prince 115**
- 3:30 p.m. Closing Ceremony in O'Bryan Performance Hall**
Welcome: Ronald Freeze, Ph.D., Co-Chair of the Research Committee
Keynote Address: "Reason and Research: Stepping Stones to Faith"
Speaker: Fr. David Pignato, Chaplain & Dean of Mission, Ave Maria School of Law
Awards: Mark Middendorf, President of Ave Maria University
Closing Prayer: Fr. David Pignato, Chaplain and Dean of Mission
- 5:00 p.m. Reception and Art Show in Bob Thomas Student Union Ballroom**

List of Student Presenters

Last Name	Name	Major(s)	Class Year	Faculty Research Mentor(s)
Misek	Andrew Misek	Applied Chemistry	Senior	Stephen Thong, Ph.D.
Lenci	Anika Lenci	Biochemistry	Freshman	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Delyon	Tyler Delyon	Biochemistry	Junior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Gotlund	Michael Gotlund	Biochemistry	Junior	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Breen	Gabriela Breen	Biochemistry	Senior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Gonzales	Martin Gonzales	Biochemistry	Senior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Jagels	Albert Jagels	Biochemistry	Senior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Le	Tiffany Le	Biochemistry	Senior	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
McNeill	Clare McNeill	Biochemistry	Senior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Yeh	Gracemarie Yeh	Biochemistry	Senior	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Freeze	Benjamin Freeze	Biochemistry	Sophomore	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
McAfee	Bree McAfee	Biochemistry	Sophomore	Stephen Thong, Ph.D.
Sielaff	Zofia Sielaff	Biochemistry	Sophomore	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Kay	Killian Kay	Biochemistry	Senior	Stephen Thong, Ph.D.
Decembrini	Damien Decembrini	Biology	Freshman	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Higgins	Gregory Higgins	Biology	Junior	Agnes Berki, Ph.D. and Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Cichon	Julia Cichon	Biology	Senior	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Lang	Zachary Lang	Biology	Senior	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Le	Amanda Le	Biology	Senior	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Pawl	Jonathan Pawl	Biology	Senior	Stephen Cronin, Ph.D.
Baez	Andrea Baez	Biology	Sophomore	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Puthumana	Angelina Puthumana	Biology	Sophomore	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.

Snyder	Isabela Snyder	Biology	Sophomore	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Iijima	Antonio Iijima	Classics & Early Christian Literature; Computer Science; Mathematics	Senior	Saverio Perugini, Ph.D.
Randolph	Anne Marie Randolph	Communications	Junior	Justin Bonanno, Ph.D.
Perez	Noah Perez	Communications	Senior	John Jasso, Ph.D.
Martinez	Michael Martinez	Computer Science; History	Senior	Saverio Perugini, Ph.D.
Ford	Aidan Ford	Environmental Science	Sophomore	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Sabatino	Vincent Sabatino	Exercise Physiology	Senior	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Kutsch	Caroline Kutsch	Health Science	Freshman	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Kubisova	Veronika Kubisova	Health Science	Junior	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Pemrick	Amelia Pemrick	Health Science	Junior	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
DiMaio	Danielle DiMaio	Health Science	Senior	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
McCarthy	Faith McCarthy	Health Science	Senior	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Talafuse	Maria-Isabella Talafuse	Health Science	Senior	Stephen Cronin, Ph.D.
Szucs	Anna Szucs	Health Science	Sophomore	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Whiting	Adelina Whiting	Health Science	Sophomore	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Campau	Emily Campau	Literature	Senior	Deana Basile Kelly, Ph.D.
Landry	Maria Landry	Literature	Senior	Jessica Schnepf, Ph.D.
Marchese	Juliana Marchese	Literature	Senior	Deana Basile Kelly, Ph.D.
Herber	Gabriel Herber	Marine Biology	Junior	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Samuel	Joy Samuel	Marine Biology	Junior	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Palmer	Charlotte Palmer	Marine Biology	Senior	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Beiter	Kyle Beiter	Marine Biology	Sophomore	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.

Chilson	Ashley Chilson	Marine Biology	Sophomore	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Voce	Maria Voce	Mathematics; Physics	Sophomore	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Basulto	Jelyssa Basulto	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Brookshire	Lillian Brookshire	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Chase	Zion Chase	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Clary	Kalia Clary	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Crantas	Jessica Crantas	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Crawford	Gianna Crawford	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
DeCleene	Maria DeCleene	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Donnett	Clare Donnett	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Egger	Sophia Egger	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Farrell	Katherine Farrell	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Frye	Grace Frye	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Gibbons	Grace Gibbons	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Grose	Abbey Grose	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Healy	Katia Healy	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Hicks	Sarah Hicks	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Legg	Celine Legg	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Leonardo	Olivia Leonardo	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN

Lewis	Elena Lewis	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Loizzo	Giovanna Loizzo	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Matista	Maryanna Matista	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Pilkington	Samuel Pilkington	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Roos	Timothy Roos	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Shahid	Eva Shahid	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Sjostedt	Gabby Sjostedt	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Troy	Grace Troy	Nursing	Senior	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Horn	Hannah Horn	Philosophy; Communications	Sophomore	Maria Fedoryka, Ph.D.
Murdock	Maria Teresa Murdock	Philosophy; Theology	Junior	Justin Bonanno, Ph.D.
Kupcho	Daniel Kupcho	Physics	Junior	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Mourad	Melana Mourad	Physics	Senior	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Breen	Grace Breen	Politics	Freshman	Lidiya Zubytska Ph.D.
Nguyen	Helen Nguyen	Politics	Junior	Seana McGuire, D.C.L.
Parks	Seth Parks	Politics	Sophomore	Lidiya Zubytska, Ph.D.
Malley	Theresa Malley	Psychology	Junior	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Owen	Clare Owen	Psychology	Junior	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Blaine	Justin Blaine	Psychology	Senior	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Chase	Therese Chase	Psychology	Senior	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Ching	Kennedy Ching	Theology	Senior	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.

Poster Session

Name	Major(s)	Class Year	Number	Faculty Research Mentor(s)
Andrew Misek	Applied Chemistry	Senior	1	Stephen Thong, Ph.D.
Anika Lenci	Biochemistry	Freshman	2, 3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Gabriela Breen	Biochemistry	Senior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Tyler Delyon	Biochemistry	Junior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Martin Gonzales	Biochemistry	Senior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Albert Jagels	Biochemistry	Senior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Clare McNeill	Biochemistry	Senior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Gracemarie Yeh	Biochemistry	Senior	3	Rodney Burton, Ph.D.
Michael Gotlund	Biochemistry	Junior	4	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Tiffany Le	Biochemistry	Senior	5	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Benjamin Freeze	Biochemistry	Sophomore	6	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Bree McAfee	Biochemistry	Sophomore	7	Stephen Thong, Ph.D.
Zofia Sielaff	Biochemistry	Sophomore	8	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Killian Kay	Biochemistry	Senior	1, 9	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Damien Decembrini	Biology	Freshman	10	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Gregory Higgins	Biology	Junior	11	Agnes Berki, Ph.D. and Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Kennedy Ching	Theology	Senior	12	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Amanda Le	Biology	Senior	12	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Jonathan Pawl	Biology	Senior	13	Stephen Cronin, Ph.D.
Antonio Iijima	Classics & Early Christian Literature; Computer Science; Mathematics	Senior	14	Saverio Perugini, Ph.D.
Zachary Lang	Biology	Senior	15	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Angelina Puthumana	Biology	Sophomore	16	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Vincent Sabatino	Exercise Physiology	Senior	17	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Isabela Snyder	Biology	Sophomore	18	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Michael Martinez	Computer Science; History	Senior	19	Saverio Perugini, Ph.D.

Theresa Malley	Psychology	Junior	20	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Justin Blaine	Psychology	Senior	21	Stefanie Morris, Ph.D.
Veronika Kubisova	Health Science	Junior	22	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Faith McCarthy	Health Science	Senior	22	Ronald Freeze, Ph.D.
Danielle DiMaio	Health Science	Senior	23	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Maria-Isabella Talafuse	Health Science	Senior	24	Stephen Cronin, Ph.D.
Anna Szucs	Health Science	Sophomore	25	Agnes Berki, Ph.D.
Caroline Kutsch	Health Science	Freshman	26	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Amelia Pemrick	Health Science	Junior	26	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Adelina Whiting	Health Science	Sophomore	26	Tony Barbosa, Ph.D.
Ashley Chilson	Marine Biology	Sophomore	27	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Joy Samuel	Marine Biology	Junior	27	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Andrea Baez	Biology	Sophomore	28	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Julia Cichon	Biology	Senior	28	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Charlotte Palmer	Marine Biology	Senior	28	Samuel Shephard, Ph.D.
Kyle Beiter	Marine Biology	Sophomore	29	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Aidan Ford	Environmental Science	Sophomore	29	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Gabriel Herber	Marine Biology	Junior	29	Sandra Tirado, Ph.D.
Daniel Kupcho	Physics	Junior	30	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Melana Mourad	Physics	Senior	30	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Maria Voce	Mathematics; Physics	Sophomore	30	Daniel Sadasivan, Ph.D.
Kalia Clary	Nursing	Senior	31	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Sophia Egger	Nursing	Senior	31	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Grace Frye	Nursing	Senior	31	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Gabby Sjostedt	Nursing	Senior	31	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN

Lillian Brookshire	Nursing	Senior	32	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Jessica Crantas	Nursing	Senior	32	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Sarah Hicks	Nursing	Senior	32	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Timothy Roos	Nursing	Senior	32	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Grace Troy	Nursing	Senior	32	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Jelyssa Basulto	Nursing	Senior	33	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Grace Gibbons	Nursing	Senior	33	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Celine Legg	Nursing	Senior	33	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Samuel Pilkington	Nursing	Senior	33	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Abbey Grose	Nursing	Senior	34	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Giovanna Loizzo	Nursing	Senior	34	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Maryanna Matista	Nursing	Senior	34	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Eva Shahid	Nursing	Senior	34	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Zion Chase	Nursing	Senior	35	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Clare Donnett	Nursing	Senior	35	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Katia Healy	Nursing	Senior	35	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Elena Lewis	Nursing	Senior	35	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Gianna Crawford	Nursing	Senior	36	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Maria DeCleene	Nursing	Senior	36	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Katherine Farrell	Nursing	Senior	36	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN
Olivia Leonardo	Nursing	Senior	36	Patricia Hojnowski-Diaz, MS, MBA, RN

Panel Session 1

1:00 p.m.–2:00 p.m.

Panel 1–Literature in Prince 116

Name	Major	Paper Title
Maria Murdock	Philosophy; Theology	"I am thy father's spirit": The Key Role of the Nature of the Ghost in Shakespeare's Hamlet
Juliana Marchese	Literature	"If I lie down in Sheol, you are there": The Trinitarian Presence of God in Dante's Hell
Emily Campau	Literature	"Seeming and being have merged": Art as a Sacramental Mediator in Dante's Purgatorio

Panel 2 - Communications and Rhetoric in Prince 115

Name	Major	Paper Title
Anne Marie Randolph	Communications	To Conceal or Reveal: The Power of Therapeutic Language and the Danger of Losing Sight of the Person
Noah Perez	Communications	Psychagogia Along the Via Negativa: The Building of a Rhetoric of Apophasis with Nicholas of Cusa, T. S. Eliot, and Mark Rothko

Panel 3 – Philosophy and Psychology Prince 114

Name	Major	Paper Title
Therese Chase	Psychology	From Acquaintance to Friend: A Phenomenological Study
Hannah Horn	Philosophy; Communications	The Heart and the Spiritual Life: God's Use of Rational Affectivity in Seasons of Consolation and Desolation

Panel Session 2

2:15 p.m.–3:15 p.m.

Panel 4–Literature in Prince 116

Name	Major	Paper Title
Juliana Marchese	Literature	“No one was paying any attention to the sky”: A Theory of Fantasy Applied to Flannery O’Connor
Maria Landry	Literature	The Terrible Speed of Wholeness: Integrative Violence in the Child Characters of Flannery O’Connor’s <i>The Violent Bear It Away</i>

Panel 5–Politics–in Prince 115

Name	Major	Paper Title
Grace Breen	Politics	“The Law and Religiosity: The Relationship Between Religious Language of States and Citizen Practice”
Helen Nguyen	Politics	Guarding the Constitution’s Authority: Why Originalism Matters in Supreme Court Interpretation
Seth Parks	Politics	Bismarckian Realpolitik: How to Wield Political Power

Keynote Address

O'Bryan Performance Hall | 3:30 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

"Reason and Research: Stepping Stones to Faith"



Fr. David Pignato Chaplain and Dean of Mission,
Ave Maria School of Law

Fr. David Pignato is chaplain, associate dean of mission, and visiting associate professor of law at Ave Maria School of Law.

A priest of the Diocese of Fall River, Massachusetts, Fr. Pignato previously served as pastor of St. Ann Parish in Raynham, Massachusetts, and as vicar for priests of the Diocese of Fall River. He was ordained in 2001.

Fr. Pignato earned his undergraduate degree from the College of the Holy Cross (1992) and his Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School (1995). Following law school, he practiced law at the Boston firm of Goodwin Procter before entering the seminary at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. While in Rome, he earned both the S.T.B. and S.T.L. degrees from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum), and later returned to complete his S.T.D. in 2010, writing his dissertation on Church-state relations.

Early in his priesthood, Fr. Pignato served at St. Julie Billiart Parish and as chaplain at Bishop Stang High School in Dartmouth, Massachusetts. He also served as personal secretary to the Most Rev. George W. Coleman, bishop of Fall River.

From 2010 to 2020, Fr. Pignato served on the faculty at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts, where he taught courses in systematic theology, including fundamental theology, Christology and ecclesiology, as well as courses in faith and reason, church and state, church history and American constitutional law.

At Ave Maria School of Law, Fr. Pignato serves as chaplain and teaches courses that reflect the law school's commitment to the integration of faith and reason.